

N. C. State English Major Acts and Directs Productions At Thompson Theatre

Herman LaVerne Jones has found his place in life. That place is the black theater, and right now North Carolina State University's Thompson Theatre is where he's pursuing his interests.

"It's a really serious thing with me," Jones, a senior English major from Garner, says earnestly about his involvement with black drama.

Jones has done what few students will do during their college careers - he has not only acted in and directed several productions at Thompson, the campus student theater, but he has formed his own company, written his own plays and staged his own

productions.

The LaVerne Players, Jones' company, performed before over 300 persons last weekend in their first show of the season, "Who's Got His Own?"

The play by Ron Milner, is a black drama as are all of Jones' productions; in it, six N. C. State students portrayed a black family in crisis.

FORMED OWN COMPANY

Jones formed his company last spring with a group of six students; this year its members number 35. Nearly that many auditioned for "Who's Got His Own," and Jones was pleased to have the large field of talent from which to choose the cast the play required.

Because there is no drama department at N. C. State, Jones rarely finds actors who possess expert theatrical skills - but he sees that as an asset rather than a liability.

"I think you can get ordinary people to do superior work," he emphasizes.

And he believes the cast of "Who's Got His Own" gave that kind of performance last weekend. "They have been the best folk in the whole world," he says. "And we have a real black thing going - there's a definite relationship between us; we just throw off energy."

This emphasis on the black experience underlies all of Jones' interests and ventures in the theater. But although he indicates that, "Basically I'm trying to hit black folk. Once we learn more about ourselves, then we can better deal with outside things," he also sees his plays as "a message to both black and white folk about their relationship."

Jones says he attempts to find dramatic material "that's going to mean something to the people who see it," a vein he says it is typical of black

theater today. He is unimpressed with theatrical productions created simply to entertain, and feels there remains a great educational role for theater to play in black communities.

REALISTIC THEATER

Jones explains that black theater is a young art form, and is still undergoing many changes. Today, he says, it deals primarily with realistic situations, particularly dwelling on black history. This aspect of black theater is something he hopes will change: "We're past the point where we always have to relate to our past."

Jones learned most of his acting and production skills through participation in other Thompson Theater shows, and during summer stock work. He acknowledges that it is sometimes difficult for a student to teach and direct his peers, but says that he feels he has a lot to offer, and that most participants in his group are very willing to learn. The LaVerne Players include several other plays in their repertoire, "Let's Make a Slave," and "Black Woman," among them.



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